

2-25-1979

# Three Generations of Italians: Interview with Albert Paesano by Norma Colaccio

Albert Paesano

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## Recommended Citation

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**COVER SHEET FOR INTERVIEWS**

**NAME OF INTERVIEWEE** Albert Paesano

**INTERVIEWER** Norma Colaccio

**DATE OF INTERVIEW** 2/25/79

**SUBJECTS COVERED**

Personal data

Questions concerning Italian ancestors

Raising a family in the "Italian way"

Use of Italian language

Depression years

Visits to Italy

Religion

Observance of Italian traditions and customs

Italians in the mainstream of society

Prejudice towards Italians

Oral History Interview

with

ALBERT PAESANO

February 25, 1979

by Norma R. Colaccio

INTERVIEWER: Would you begin by telling me what your name is please.

INTERVIEWEE: Albert Paesano.

INTERVIEWER: Would you please tell me something about yourself, Mr. Paesano.

INTERVIEWEE: I'm 62 years of age, been living in Providence, Rhode Island most of most of my life; married, retired from the United States Post Office, previous to that I worked in textile mills and also I attended Rhode Island School of Design where we took textile designing and construction of narrow fabrics mostly tapes and bindings. When I was a young boy, eight years old, I went to Italian school in the evenings, classes with a private instructor for about six years, so I became pretty in-fluent in reading and writing Italian.



INTERVIEWER: Okay, since you are a second generation Italian-American, I'm going to first ask you some questions about your ethnic background. Where were your parents born in Italy?

INTERVIEWEE: In a place called Isola Liri, it is in the Isola Valley, close to where Mount Casino is, mostly agricultural and paper mills because they were getting their power from water falls which are prevalent in that area. My father came to this country the first time in 1908, went back to Italy for a short stay and returned here around the 1914, followed by my mother in 1915 who came here to marry my father for he had sent for her, they were married in Boston and were living in Newport, New Hampshire where I was born. At the age of about a month and a half, we moved to Providence and have lived ever since in the area of the north end around Charles Street.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know of the reasons why your father came to America?

INTERVIEWEE: Like most immigrants, they came here to better their way of life and to earn a better living for themselves and their families to come.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned that your father first came

to America and then returned to Italy. Do you know why he returned to Italy?

INTERVIEWEE: I think he went back to Italy because his father was very very sick and they didn't expect him to live long so he went back to see him and after that he returned to America and lived in New Hampshire, where he had been there for the previous 10 years.

INTERVIEWER: I see, what was your father's occupation in Italy?

INTERVIEWEE: Mostly agricultural and worked in paper mills.

INTERVIEWER: And when he came to America, what was his trade?

INTERVIEWEE: In New Hampshire he worked as a log cutter in the lumber camps and came to Providence and worked mostly in textiles.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, where did your father first settle in America?

INTERVIEWEE: Newport, New Hampshire.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, was this his permanent place of settlement?

INTERVIEWEE: No, because afterwards he had relatives here in Providence and they insisted on coming and living here, that is the women folks insisted on living here.

INTERVIEWER: Do you still live in this general area as where your parents settled?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, I do.

INTERVIEWER: Is there a reason for this?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, it is because we built our home here and earned our employment in the area factories, also our family and friends are here.

INTERVIEWER: I see, since your parents were both Italian-Americans, do you feel that they raised their children in the Italian way, why or why not?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, they did, because they believed in it and they thought that was the proper way of raising their children in a so-called foreign country to them.

INTERVIEWER: Could you tell me something about the way you were brought up that brings to mind that you were brought up in Italian way.

INTERVIEWEE: Well, the respect of one's elders, to obey the elders, to strive to achieve whatever goals they had set for you and your own personal goals.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned earlier in the interview that you went to an Italian school, therefore, was Italian the principal language in your own home when you were growing up?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, it was, the ones that spoke English were my brother and my sisters, the elderly people



all spoke Italian--very little English. Although in the neighborhood we lived in, most of the people were Italian and we met the people in the street, if they spoke Italian we answered Italian and conversed in Italian. If some of them spoke English, then we conversed in the English language.

INTERVIEWER: I see, was English spoken among the brothers and sisters?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, it was.

INTERVIEWER: I see, do you remember your family having to struggle to make ends meet at anytime while you were growing up?

INTERVIEWEE: Absolutely, during the height of the depression between 1931--I mean rather from the 30's to about the 33's it was very very hard. It is hand-me-down clothing and hardly any money, although there was always food on the table, but it was a struggle like anybody else.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, we are going to change pace a little bit. Have you ever visited Italy?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes I have. In 1971 for a 15-day vacation.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, where did you go?

INTERVIEWEE: Most of the principal cities like Milan, Rome, Naples, Venice, Capri, Florence, Verona and

Padua, it was more or less--we flew into Milan, Italy and there was a bus there which took us to different cities and stayed maybe a couple of days and then moved along from city to city.

INTERVIEWER: Sounded like an interesting trip. You saw most of Italy while you were there.

INTERVIEWEE: Most of the highlights and the principal cities.

INTERVIEWER: I see, was there any particular part of Italy that you particularly liked or was particularly overwhelming?

INTERVIEWEE: Capri was nice, Rome was very very nice, especially the Vatican where I climbed up the Cupola, there saw the City of Rome before us and Venice was nice. Really we didn't have that much time to see most of it. Whatever we did we, we enjoyed.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, do you have any relatives living in Italy?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, I do. I have a lot of cousins both on my mother's and father's side.

INTERVIEWER: Are they first cousins?

INTERVIEWEE: First cousins, yes they are.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have an opportunity to visit them while you were in Italy?



INTERVIEWEE: No, I did not. I didn't get a chance to see either one of them. Although I did meet some of them here in this country, some of them came over to visit.

INTERVIEWER: I see. When you visited Italy, what kind of impression did it leave in your mind for your years to follow?

INTERVIEWEE: It is exactly ~~how~~ my folks had explained it and how they described it. A country with lots of churches, beautiful ornaments, gardens and palaces and the people are very very cordial and nice. The youth, happy go lucky. They don't seem to have the worries and hustles and bustles we have in this country.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, when you were in Italy, did you have an opportunity to visit the paese your parents were from?

INTERVIEWEE: No, we did not. We went by there on the autostrada. The autostrada is like the super highways in this country, we went right by it, but we didn't stop.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, would you return to Italy again?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, I would.

INTERVIEWER: Are you planning any trips in the near future?

INTERVIEWEE: I do not know. We don't know what will happen, but may be we will go back and take a look at

some other parts of it that we didn't see in the first time.

INTERVIEWER: Would you ever consider living there?

INTERVIEWEE: No I would not.

INTERVIEWER: Why?

INTERVIEWEE: Because you're an American and there is a difference and proud to be an American and there is no place like America. You notice that more when you are in a foreign country, you notice all the different luxuries and things that you gave up if you do live in these different countries, you notice the contrast in Italy, between what we left and what we saw and what we had.

INTERVIEWER: I see, were your parents strict Roman Catholics?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes they were.

INTERVIEWER: Did they attend church regularly?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, not too regularly like all Italians, some of them skip a few times, but they obeyed their religion and they practiced it.

INTERVIEWER: I see, was it basically a money kind of problem?

INTERVIEWEE: Mostly it was. Mostly it was.

INTERVIEWER: Do you feel religion is an important aspect of your life?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes it is.

INTERVIEWER: Is this--is your answer a reflection of your up-bringing or ~~is it~~ something that is important to you as a person?

INTERVIEWEE: It is important to me as a person, because without it I do not think we would have gotten this far in our lives.

INTERVIEWER: What Italian traditions to you feel are very important to you as an Italian-American?

INTERVIEWEE: Observing all the customs, the holidays, the closeness of the families, the respect--the close personal respect and environment between brothers and sisters and the up bringing of the children--all these families--and the regards to trying to obey and be as good a citizen of the community as you are in your own home.

INTERVIEWER: What celebrations do you practice or follow without fail?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, most of the Italian customs like saints days and holidays, Christmas, Easter.

INTERVIEWER: Do you feel you celebrated these holidays differently because you are an Italian-American, as other Americans would celebrate them?

INTERVIEWEE: I think we do. I think we do.

INTERVIEWER: Could you tell me some of the things that are different, such as with Christmas?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, Christmas is like most Italian families,



most of the Italian families are large and huge and have large gatherings, all friends and relatives always drop over. I don't think you see that in other nationalities.

INTERVIEWER: Do you feel Italian-Americans have a firm place in our society?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes they do and they have worked hard for it and now they are involved in politics which is not more than right.

INTERVIEWER: What else do you feel Italian-Americans are involved in in our society besides politics?

INTERVIEWEE: A lot of them are men of learning, teaching, building and men of professions like doctors and lawyers, actually they are an asset to this country like other ethnic groups.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think they are spread out in society?

INTERVIEWEE: Certainly.

INTERVIEWER: Have you ever encountered any prejudice due to your nationality?

INTERVIEWEE: We did years ago when we were young, but you hardly notice it any more, no more than other people do, other groups.

INTERVIEWER: Do you recall any special incident that you could tell me about?

INTERVIEWEE: Once I worked in a place where somebody mentioned my name and other parties "All are

Italians", as if to say he didn't bother with us because of our nationality.

INTERVIEWER: How did you handle that situation?

INTERVIEWEE: Just ignored it.

INTERVIEWER: Did you always ignore situations like that?

INTERVIEWEE: Most of them.

INTERVIEWER: I see. And lastly I think you mentioned it before, but for the benefit of just ending the tape, do you consider yourself an Italian or an American?

INTERVIEWEE: I am an American.

INTERVIEWER: Why are you an American?

INTERVIEWEE: Because I realize all the opportunities we had in this nation that people in other countries didn't have and I think that if we had lived in Italy we wouldn't come as far as we did here in the country.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you very much, Mr. Paesano.